# 1

# BRANDING

A brand is essentially a reflection of an organization's identity, which means that branding is a crucial part of crafting a good public relations strategy. A strong, effective brand should communicate an organization's purpose and values to the public and all its stakeholders, is easily identifiable, and fosters positive associations in the mind of stakeholders long after a public relations campaign has ended.

The cases in this chapter, executed on behalf of the University of West Georgia, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the state of Mississippi, all illustrate how important branding is to an organization and how effective brands can be for communicating with audiences and key stakeholders.

## "AMAZING THINGS HAPPEN WHEN YOU GO WEST": RAISING VISIBILITY, INTEREST, AND ENROLLMENT

*Jami Payne Bower, Associate Vice President, University Communications and Marketing, University of West Georgia*

*Amber M. K. Smallwood, Associate Professor of Mass Communications, University of West Georgia*

## SITUATION

The University of West Georgia (UWG) is the state's seventh-largest public university, with a fall of 2017 enrollment of approximately 13,520. The university is located 45 minutes from Atlanta and draws students from 44 states and 75 countries. As UWG evolved, it developed a track record of growth in academic programs and in

student enrollment. More recently, however, enrollment growth rates were slowing. Total enrollment growth slowed at some points from 2003 (10,255) to 2006 (10,163) and again from 2008 (11,252) to 2010 (11,283). In sum, the university saw the opportunity to increase its brand recognition among key constituencies including faculty, staff, alumni, students, prospective students, and parents. It needed to find ways to differentiate, and stand out, from peer universities.

## RESEARCH

To better define the institutional challenge, UWG commissioned the university's Survey Research Center to gauge key constituencies' awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of the university.

Four focus groups were held with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community audiences, comprising 7–10 individuals per group. Common themes heard in focus groups included the following:

> You could be a marginal student, an average student, or an exceptional student. No matter where you came from, you're going to leave better. There's a niche for everyone here.

> We provide a lot of opportunities. We're just the right size for that. There are opportunities for faculty interaction and involvement that you'd never have at a huge school.

> We're not your father's West Georgia. We've grown in research, in academics, in admissions. But we've done it quietly.

Phone surveys were conducted within a 10-county area surrounding the university and stretching to the Atlanta metro area. A total of 282 surveys were completed with prospective students, parents, and influencers. Additionally, a total of 585 web surveys were completed by undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and alumni. A key finding of this research was low awareness of the university; about 42% of respondents were not familiar with UWG. Among the various groups surveyed (including within metro Atlanta), there was considerable confusion about the difference between UWG and other institutions that include *Georgia* as part of their name. In addition to surveys, agency partner Mindpower Inc., a communications and marketing firm in Atlanta, conducted several weeks of intensive campaign interviews with campus leadership (administrators, deans, department chairs, etc.), campus directors (admissions, enrollment management, student affairs, athletics, alumni, development, etc.), civic and community groups, alumni groups, UWG board and foundation members, and student, faculty, and staff groups. This qualitative research revealed those who were familiar with UWG described it as up-and-coming, cool, understated, right-sized, a place for involvement and personal discovery, open-minded, proud, engaged, non-elite, first-choice, and ambitious. Through the focus groups, surveys, and interviews, it became clear that the university did not suffer from a negative perception. Rather, there was a bewildering non-perception. Survey participants noted a lack of tradition or legacy as the university

was not known for specific traditions. They noted that UWG was not top-of-mind or in the "considered" category for many prospective students. It seemed many of the state's brightest students might not have UWG on their radars.

## ACTION PLANNING

In 2010, university leadership, with a $2 million campaign budget, designated developing and investing in a brand identity as a top priority with the following goals in mind:

- Raise and improve the university's regional profile.

- Become a first-choice destination for more students.

The overall message for the campaign was that UWG was ready to show the world what it meant to "Go West." That phrase expressed not only where UWG was, but where it was going—becoming a forward-looking, future-oriented institution.

For students, UWG emphasized that to Go West was to explore, discover, and learn, both about oneself and about the world around one. Go West was a symbol of the academic community UWG had built and how that atmosphere could help students attain their goals and aspirations.

For prospective students (10th–12th graders) and parents (particularly mothers ages 45–54), Go West provided the opportunity for students who did not want to follow the crowd to be inspired by the virtually unlimited ways to *make their mark* through leadership opportunities, discovering potential career paths, and finding new ways to make a difference.

Faculty and staff could make their mark in the programs and courses they developed to support students—through research, mentoring, and transforming student lives.

Alumni went west and beyond to make their mark in successful lives and careers. Since they had blazed their own trails, they were in an excellent position to inspire and support the independent, adventurous spirit of the students who would follow.

Local communities and the general public could be inspired by the Go West spirit to connect to, and show support for, the campus community and recommend that the high school students in their lives explore UWG.

The objectives for this campaign, all to be accomplished by December 31, 2013, included the following:

- Increase awareness from 82.6% to 85.1%.

- Increase familiarity from 64.2% to 66.1%.

- Increase microsite visits and visits to the UWG home page by 2% to 3%.

- Increase social media following by 5% to 10%, dependent on the platform.

- Maintain a high level of students recommending UWG to other students.

- Maintain the number of applications in 2013 (which had slightly dipped in 2012).

- Collaborate with enrollment management/admissions to increase enrollment by 2.3%.

**BURSTING WITH IDEAS AND PASSION?**

**HEAD WEST.** Going West means having plenty of room for your mind to roam. Whether you're an artist in need of a canvas or an up-and-coming entrepreneur with a revolutionary business idea, you'll have plenty of opportunities to change the world as you know it at the University of West Georgia. With 106 mind-opening majors, more than 150 student organizations, and countless research and internship opportunities, you'll create your own path to success. Ready to explore West? **gowestgeorgia.com**

**GO WEST**

**UNIVERSITY of West Georgia.**

*Source:* University of West Georgia, www.westga.edu/admissions/. Reproduced with permission.

## COMMUNICATION

The UWG brand story was first shared internally to rally support, engagement, and excitement. The campus roll-out included each of the following:

- Multiple consensus-building presentations: The UWG brand rollout was presented to key constituencies to seek support and enthusiasm for the campaign. Presentation settings included UWG leadership, the brand committee, the presidential advisory council, three campus town hall meetings, the faculty senate, admissions and recruiters, business and finance partners, student organizations (including the UWG Student Government Association, the Public Relations Student Society of America, and the UWG Center for Student Involvement), athletics, and local and Atlanta-area alumni and key influencers.

- Campus engagement campaigns: Teaser chatter went viral on social media channels and the UWG website to target students, faculty, and staff with messaging to generate intrigue and excitement, such as "Watch for something BIG at UWG!" and "Get on the Brand Wagon!"

- Go West "Pack Pride" card: Students, faculty, staff, community members, and alumni presenting their branded Go West "Pack Pride" card or key fob received discounts from local area merchants.

The external campaign included advertising and publicity launched locally and in Atlanta:

- Paid placement/advertising: Spanning television and cable, outdoor, cinema, radio, digital, newspaper (local and west Georgia region), and targeted area business and chamber publications, the incorporation of paid media was foundational in the success and outcomes of the comprehensive communications campaign due to its mass reach appeal.

- Digital presence: The UWG website takeover featured high-interest stories, testimonials, and vibrant imagery that made a significant splash and provided the opportunity to optimize the site for efficient Internet searches. In addition, Google AdWords (the display of advertising copy and/or imagery linked to targeted keywords) provided a solid place for inquiry and interest. Digital display ads were placed on premium sites based on key target audience demographics

(gender, age segmentation, geographic location, etc.). The campaign used video to capture attention and placed messages on targeted music-streaming service platforms. Multiple digital screens across campus featured branded content.

- Press mentions: The UWG Go West brand story was featured as a cover story in the national *Higher Education Marketing Report* publication. Local newspapers and magazines in the west Georgia region featured news of the Go West campaign. The UWG student newspaper, radio and television stations, and social media platforms featured the brand launch with periodic follow-up pieces.

- UWG Go West microsite (www.westga .edu/admissions): All aforementioned communications strategies pointed prospects to a dedicated microsite full of information for how to "apply west." The fully branded site showcased stories and videos featuring "best of west" students, faculty, and alumni. This included a "who's going west" section for students to share their individual experiences from all walks of academic and campus life, a Go West gear tab, and, most prominently, the "apply" button. Prospects requesting more information on UWG received Go West magnetic shields.
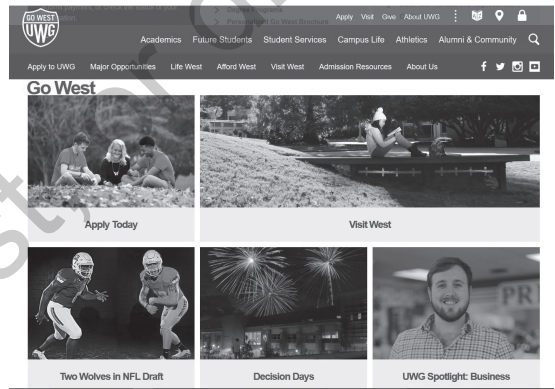
## EVALUATION

A 2014 telephone survey of the 10-county area surrounding UWG revealed 80.9% of respondents had heard of UWG (slightly down from 82.6% in 2013) and were familiar with the institution (up from 64.2% in 2013). Go West microsite visits were up 93.4% (2015 peak of 8,830 vs. 2010 benchmark of 4,565). Go West microsite unique visits were up 120.3% (2015 peak of 8,301 vs. 2010 benchmark of 3,768). University home page total visits were up 0.3% (2015 peak of 595,716 vs. 2010 benchmark of 593,814). Evaluation of social media found that Facebook likes were up 283.4% (2015 peak of 21,681 vs. 2010 benchmark of 5,655). Twitter followers were up 1203.7% (2015 peak of 3,846 vs. 2010 benchmark of 295). LinkedIn company connections were up 1070.3% (2015 peak of 5,945 vs. 2010 benchmark of 508). LinkedIn university connections were up 40.4% (2015 peak of 33,354 vs. 2013 benchmark of 23,748). A 2014 web-based survey of faculty and staff revealed the main message of the campaign seen or heard by faculty and staff was overwhelmingly Go West. Of respondents, 90% reported having been exposed to brand messaging through the top four media—billboards, radio, television, and social media.

A 2014 student web-based survey mirrored this. Go West was overwhelmingly cited as the main message of the campaign. Additionally, three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported recommending UWG to other students. UWG's Admissions Office tracked significant increases in campus visits and attendance at scheduled campus preview days. Attendance was up 41.1% (2015 peak of 1,957 visitors vs. 2011 benchmark of 1,387 preview day visitors). The number of prospective students visiting campus increased 26.6% (2015 = 5,459 campus visitors vs. 2012 = 4,312 campus visitors). Submitted applications were up 23.8% (fall of 2015 = 7,878 vs. fall of 2010 benchmark = 6,361). Student enrollment was up more than 15% (fall of 2017 = 13,520 vs. fall of 2010 benchmark = 11,283).

From 2011 to 2015, the Go West campaign itself garnered three Telly Awards, four *Higher Education Marketing Report* Awards (including Best of Show), and 11 Council for the Advancement and Support of Education Region III Awards (including the Grand Award).

## RACE PIT STOP

### Discussion Questions

1. The UWG campaign used both qualitative (focus groups and interviews) and quantitative (surveys) research methods to help inform the campaign strategy. What are the benefits of using both types of research, and how did it help this campaign?

2. The authors indicate that name recognition, awareness, and familiarity surveys were conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the campaign. What is the benefit of doing this? Would all communications campaigns benefit from this? Why or why not?

3. Why was it important to share the new "brand story" with internal audiences first?

4. Based on the results reported in the evaluation section of the case, did the campaign achieve all the objectives laid out in the action planning section. Would this campaign be considered a success? Why or why not?

### Trendlines

Higher education, as an industry, is facing an increasingly complex landscape. As *Inside Higher Ed* notes, decreasing student enrollments, costs, an increasing focus on applied skills, and declining funding from states are some of the issues colleges are struggling with now.[1] In addition to these issues, traditional higher education institutions face increasing competition from for-profit colleges for students. While some institutions are searching for ways to attract students and gain a competitive edge, others have been forced to close. Smaller, liberal arts colleges are particularly at risk, since they have fewer resources than some of the larger universities. Examples of these closings can be seen across the country at schools such as Bethany University in California, which closed in 2011.

With the increasing pressure on higher education to be competitive, cost-efficient, and self-sustaining, schools are creatively finding ways to raise their visibility with various audiences. UWG's campaign focused on raising its profile with more regional audiences. Would the university have benefited from a nationwide strategy? Research some of the other public universities in your area. What can you determine about those schools' public relations strategies? How do they compare to the strategies and tactics UWG used?

# REFERENCE

1. Rudgers, L. M., & Peterson, J. A. (2017, January 13). Coming in 2017. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/01/13/upcoming-trends-2017-colleges-should-prepare-essay

## GROWING THE POPE'S FLOCK

*Fred Cook, Chief Executive Officer, Golin*

### SITUATION

In anticipation of Pope Francis's historic first visit to the United States in September 2015, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recognized the welcome opportunity to make a big social media splash surrounding the Pope and increase Hispanic engagement on USCCB social media channels. The USCCB, with the availability of cutting-edge 21st century social media tools and techniques, could now bring the Pope's message, developed over the first 20 centuries, to the people like never before and encourage Catholics and non-Catholics to perform acts of mercy in accordance with the Church's mission.

### RESEARCH

In preparation for relevant content and messages, the team conducted a robust social listening audit in both English and Spanish to understand the issues and attitudes surrounding the Catholic Church and the Pope. Those topics—from climate change, the Middle East conflict, and poverty to marriage and family, child abuse, and immigration—informed communications strategies. A comprehensive communications playbook mapped out potential issues and opportunities, and identified actionable engagements and trending conversations that were preplanned for release during real-time moments throughout the visit. For example, the Church found that Spanish conversation differed from English in several key topics, such as immigration and the canonization of 18th century priest Junípero Serra. Understanding that those topics would drive significant Hispanic conversation, the Church prioritized engagement with influencers and the sharing of real-time content that aligned to the messages that the Pope would deliver to the Hispanic audience.

### ACTION PLANNING

The USCCB's goal was to amplify the message of the visit, "love is our mission," and joyously move people to merciful action. Merciful action was defined as anything from

praying to showing compassion for another human to sharing a message from the Church that resonated with individuals.

The USCCB wanted to appeal to a total marketing audience that included Catholics and non-Catholics. It appealed to the important millennial audiences (knowing how active they are on social media) through content that resonates with them including GIFs and video, and its total market approach to certain topics such as immigration helped ensure the USCCB reached the Hispanic audience. Additionally, when communicating with policy makers or Church leaders, at times the USCCB needed to be mindful of emphasizing Catholic beliefs or correcting misinterpretations of the Pope's actions or statements. Still, for all targets, love and mercy was the central message emphasized.

Campaign objectives were as follows:

- Protect and promote the messages of Pope Francis by driving impressions and engagements with the USCCB's messages.

- Engage with the faithful to share and encourage their acts of mercy.

- Spread messages of love and unity around the world.

- Achieve a more positive view of the Catholic Church.

## COMMUNICATION

Golin developed a holistic media strategy that encompassed social content, influencer outreach (i.e., making connections with influential people), and proactive media messaging. In recognizing the significant media coverage and social conversation that the Pope's visit would spark, the team created a unique social presence for the USCCB that would distinctly amplify the Pope's messages. New Twitter and Instagram handles were created in both English and Spanish (@PopeInUS and @PapaEnUSA),

# #PopeInUS

*Source:* Courtesy of Golin. Reproduced with permission.

and, in partnership with Twitter, a hashtag emoji of the Pope in front of an American flag was auto-populated for #PopeInUS and #PapaEnUSA. To successfully execute significant media outreach and social engagement, the team relied on The Bridge—Golin's approach for real-time insights, influencer engagement, and media outreach— comprising strategists, writers, editors, designers, and creative content developers. This team created 2,268 pieces of social media content in the form of creative images, messages, and GIFs, including 62 videos. For example, the USCCB shared a video at the end of each day highlighting the moments and shared quotes and GIFs from Pope Francis that aligned with the goal of his visit. In addition, the team responded to more than 1,500 influencers and Pope fans in both English and Spanish in inspiring ways that the Church had never done before. To do this, the USCCB identified people attending or watching events of the visit, and asked them individually via social media what they were praying for. People responded to the USCCB with prayers of peace, love, and health for Pope Francis, among many other things.

Throughout the six-day U.S. papal visit, there were 73 billion mentions of the Pope, which comes to about 10 million mentions per minute. The team analyzed these mentions, pinpointed the most influential voices advocating for the church, and then responded, creating relevant content to amplify their voices in real time (the average turnaround time between noticing these prime opportunities and then responding was seven minutes). For example, the USCCB hand-delivered a St. Genesius medal (the patron saint of actors and comedians) and note to Stephen Colbert, congratulating him on his new show. When notables such as Anderson Cooper tweeted about how amazing it was to be close to the Pope, the team shared a celebratory response and commented on what a joyous occasion it was. And when a potentially negative topic surfaced, the team shared real-time quotes from Pope Francis to help amplify the messages of love and mercy.
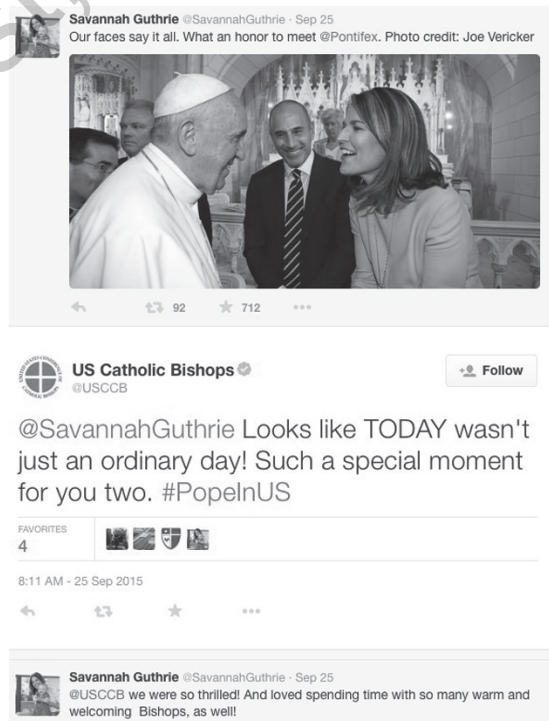


Source: Twitter/@PopeInUS.

## EVALUATION

Overall, the USCCB efforts contributed 30 million earned media impressions in English and Spanish toward the Pope's visit, and 5.1 billion impressions of the campaign's hashtags, #PopeInUS and #PapaEnUSA. This was more than 8% of the total papal visit conversation, ushering in a new era of evangelism for the Pope and the Catholic Church in the United States.

The team created 2,268 pieces of content, including 62 videos, in real time. Over the course of the visit, the USCCB drove 1.65 million video views (more than 13,000 views per hour) and engaged with more than 1,300 individuals. Of those individuals, 120 were influencers, such as Bette Midler, Anderson Cooper, and Shakira. Following the visit, 28% of U.S. adults said they had a more positive view of the Catholic Church because of Pope Francis, according to the Pew Research Center,[1] and the USCCB gained influential followers such as Katie Couric and U.S. Speaker of the House John Boehner.



Source: Twitter/@SavannahGuthrie/@USCCB.

## RACE PIT STOP

### Discussion Questions

1. As part of this campaign in anticipation of Pope Francis's visit, research was conducted on both English- and Spanish-speaking audiences. Why do you think it was particularly important for the public relations team to research both of these audiences?

2. The target audiences for this campaign were very broad (e.g., millennials). Most campaigns try to target very specific audiences. Does it make sense for the public relations team to have such broad target audiences? Why or why not?

3. The public relations team countered any potentially negative topics with quotations from the Pope that reinforced the key messages of mercy and love. Was this a good strategy for handling negative comments? Were there different approaches that could have been used as well?

4. Review the objectives for the campaign. What changes would you recommend, if any?

### Trendlines

Organized religion in the United States is at a crossroads, with modest decreases in the number of Americans identifying themselves as religious—from 92% to 89% over a seven-year period.[2] While the decrease is small, it is expected to rise in the coming years with a growing number of millennials avoiding affiliation with any organized faith. As the Pew Research Center notes, the "none" demographic, who are religiously unaffiliated, has increased by 6% over a seven-year period, and while members of this group are not necessarily atheists or agnostics, they do not wish to be part of any organized religion. This could be a concern for established religious institutions if this number continues to rise in the years ahead.

The decrease of religiously affiliated Americans could be of great concern for the Catholic Church, and as the most visible Catholic official, the Pope could play a big role in retaining members in the Church. In addition to the strategies and tactics discussed in this case study, what other ways could the Church use public relations to both retain members and recruit new ones?

## REFERENCES

1. Positive impact of Pope Francis on views of the church, especially among Democrats and liberals. (2015, October 7). *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/2015/10/07/following-visit-two-thirds-in-u-s-view-pope-francis-favorably/

2. U.S. public becoming less religious. (2015, November 3). *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/

## MISSISSIPPI, BELIEVE IT: ELEVEN YEARS AND MOVING FORWARD

*Jesse McCraw, Brand Strategist, The Cirlot Agency*

## SITUATION

Mississippi is rooted in its rich culture and history, though much of its history is negative. The perception of the state echoes stereotypes of a region occupied by uneducated, obese, poor, and racist citizens. *Forbes*'s "Best States for Business" list has Mississippi at the bottom in economic climate and quality of life. *Education Week*'s Quality Counts report shows Mississippi at the bottom for academic achievement. The United Health Foundation places Mississippi as 50th in America's Health Rankings, its findings based on the state's high rates of infectious diseases, low adolescent immunization rates, low birth weights, high number of deaths associated with cardiovascular diseases, and high infant mortality rates. Though the state remains at the bottom of many national lists, The Cirlot Agency found an opportunity to use the stereotypes of Mississippi as a means of communicating the greatness that stems from the state. In March 2003, Rick Looser, president and chief operating officer of The Cirlot Agency, was seated next to a 12-year-old boy from Connecticut on a plane headed from Washington, DC, to Jackson, Mississippi. After hearing his southern accent, the boy asked where Looser was from. When Looser said that he lived in Mississippi, the 12-year-old asked: "Do you see the Ku Klux Klan on your streets every day, and do you hate all black people?" Looser was surprised that this was the image of Mississippi as seen through the eyes of a private school–educated child; but he also saw that the state's negative reputation could be a launching point to capture the attention of an audience and to highlight the accomplishments of the state. Starting in December 2005, The Cirlot Agency, headquartered in Jackson, debuted the Mississippi, Believe It! (MBI) campaign, a pro bono initiative that the agency took on for the state. MBI's intent was to tell Americans that the stereotype that stemmed from the Mississippi of 1960 is not who Mississippi is today. In 2015, during its 10th year, those associated with the MBI campaign saw a continued need to heighten awareness of these aspects of the state of Mississippi.



*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit. com/. Reproduced with permission.

## RESEARCH

Although many states have implemented promotional campaigns in the past, The Cirlot Agency had no knowledge of a public relations campaign like MBI. While researching other campaigns, the agency discovered most were for tourism or for taking up residency, such as the famous "Virginia



*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit. com/. Reproduced with permission.

**Soul Survivor.**

Among all the great independent R&B labels of the past, only one remains today, bringing the soulful, faithful, joyful noise of blues, Gospel and Soul music to the world. Mississippi's Malaco Records. Since 1967, Malaco has brought iconic recording artists to the forefront, winning scores of Grammy, Stellar and Billboard Music Awards along the way. This is the sound legacy of the place known as the "Last Soul Company"... firmly rooted in Mississippi. And that's the gospel truth.

**MISSISSIPPI...**
*Believe It!*
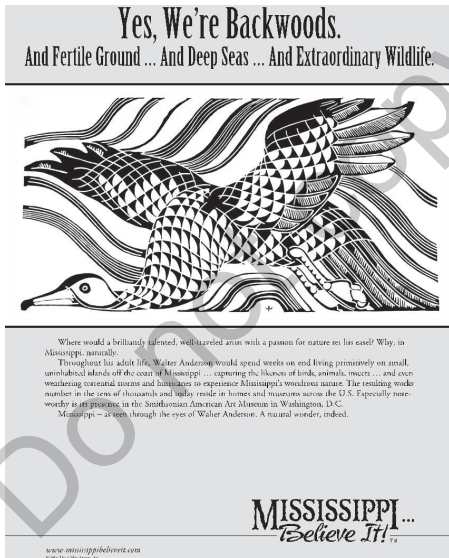
*www.mississippibelieveit.com*

*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit. com/. Reproduced with permission.

Is for Lovers" campaign, which has been an ongoing, successful campaign since 1969. These efforts, however, are not like MBI in that the campaign does something that most public relations campaigns would never do—repeat the worst things people have said about you.

As its 11th year approached, the MBI campaign had established itself as a voice for greater public understanding about the state. The agency's effort was greatly centered on placing public service advertisements in newspapers throughout Mississippi. Agency members met with the editorial boards of Mississippi's daily newspapers, resulting in almost all agreeing to feature the ads in their publications for free. Over the years, MBI messages played against negative and offensive stereotypical statements to highlight the positive aspects of the state. Ads used humor to get individuals to have an "I didn't know that" moment about the state.

## ACTION PLANNING

The goal was to expose as many people as possible to the message that the Mississippi of 1960 is not the Mississippi of today. The campaign targeted all those within and outside the state who call Mississippi home. This began as an internal effort, because unless the



**Yes, We're Backwoods.**
And Fertile Ground ... And Deep Seas ... And Extraordinary Wildlife.

Where would a brilliantly talented, well-traveled artist with a passion for nature set his easel? Why, in Mississippi, naturally.

Throughout his adult life, Walter Anderson would spend weeks on end living primitively on small, uninhabited islands off the coast of Mississippi ... capturing the likeness of birds, animals, insects ... and even weathering torrential storms and hurricanes to experience Mississippi's wondrous nature. The resulting works number in the tens of thousands and today reside in homes and museums across the U.S. Especially noteworthy is its presence in the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Mississippi – as seen through the eyes of Walter Anderson. A natural wonder, indeed.

**MISSISSIPPI...**
*Believe It!*

*www.mississippibelieveit.com*

*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit. com/. Reproduced with permission.

people of Mississippi feel positive and passionate about their state, it is hard to convince anyone else to feel the same. The intent was to help make the people of Mississippi its best ambassadors. MBI also focused on all fourth-grade students in Mississippi with the message that they can be whatever they want to be in life. The posters act as an example of all those who came from Mississippi and what they have been able to achieve. For some of these students, sitting in classrooms located in the poorest state in the country, that message will resonate for a lifetime. Finally, the agency wanted the campaign to reach those outside of the state who have preconceived, stereotypical, and negative opinions regarding Mississippi, or simply know little to nothing about the state.

As the campaign entered its 11th year, Cirlot sought to deliver one set of all 22 posters to approximately 1,100 schools in Mississippi by April 2017. The central approach for the campaign was to continue using negative stereotypes to highlight the accomplishments of Mississippi through four new ads and through lesson plans for fourth-grade students. Two of the new ads focused on Mississippi being the first, as

opposed to the last: honoring the first female NFL referee and the first African American aviator in the U.S. Navy.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Within the state of Mississippi, press releases announcing the campaign were sent to select newspapers, magazines, and trade publications, along with the Associated Press and other wire services. Posters were sent to approximately 1,100 public and private K–12 schools and every college and university in the state.

In December 2016, Cirlot hosted a press conference celebrating the campaign's 11th anniversary with the release of four new ads, and announced that the campaign had been integrated into lesson plans, which were made available to all fourth-grade teachers in the state. The first two ads focused on Mississippi being the first, as opposed to the last: honoring the first female NFL referee, Sarah Thomas, and the first African American aviator in the U.S. Navy, Jesse Brown. The third ad continued to highlight Mississippians' accomplishments with Malaco Records, known as the "Last Soul Company." The final ad used the same theme and play on words to recognize one of its most famous artists, naturalist Walter Anderson (Mississippians are often referred to as "backwoods").

The Cirlot Agency added elements to the MBI website to complement the communications tactics, which included media kits, frequently asked questions, lesson plans, poster request forms, and all the ads in downloadable formats. The agency also aired the press conference through Facebook Live, as well as promoted the campaign through paid social media ads. Prior to the announcements, Rick Looser met with the publisher of Jackson, Mississippi's *Clarion-Ledger* to talk about the campaign. Subsequently, in its Sunday edition, the *Clarion-Ledger* ran a story on the campaign and dedicated a full page to the most recognized ad: "Yes, we can read. A few of us can even write."

With the set of posters, Cirlot included a specialty ad, which combines elements of several ads to highlight Mississippi as "The Birthplace of America's Music," featuring W. C. Handy, Jimmie Rodgers, and Elvis Presley.

## EVALUATION

Prior to 2015, the campaign received coverage from several TV outlets in Mississippi, along with Mississippi Public
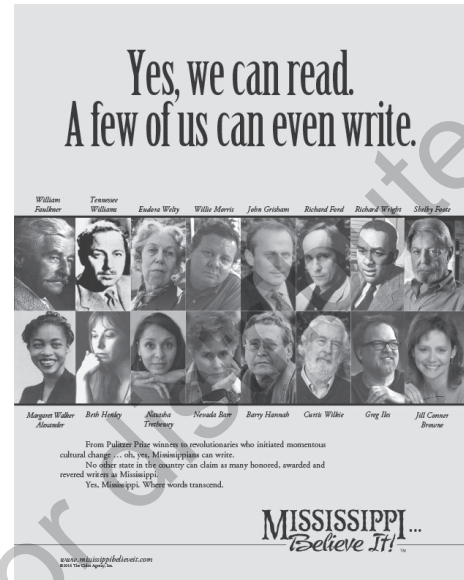


*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit.com/. Reproduced with permission.



*Source:* The Cirlot Agency (2016), www.mississippibelieveit.com/. Reproduced with permission.

Broadcasting and university and college publications. The campaign also received a long line of coverage, including from the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *U.S. News & World Report*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the Associated Press, the *Washington Post*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer.* MBI was also featured on NBC's *Today* show as well as NPR's *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*, Fox News Radio, and Voice of America radio. Across these news stories, media coverage normally emphasized the stark contrast that the campaign portrays versus the stereotypical caricature of Mississippi and the people who live there. *Washington Post* journalist Neely Tucker, a Mississippi native, said, "I can tell you the best part of the ads is that they leave out the full wording. This is good writing. You say one thing and people know you mean something else." From 2005 to its 11th year, the campaign was viewed by an estimated 150 million people.

Finally, an ongoing relationship with Mississippi public schools helped Cirlot realize that there was an opportunity to further integrate MBI messages into lesson plans. People had begun reaching out to Cirlot to describe how the posters were being used in elementary schools, especially in fourth-grade classrooms, where Mississippi history is first taught. Teachers began requesting additional posters as materials to help teach their lessons. One Mississippi sixth-grade teacher said, "I had the most wonderful time reading these ads to my class. I want them to feel as proud of Mississippi as I do. I made a copy of each ad for them to share with their families. Thanks for the positive spin on our state. We always knew what we had. Thanks for sharing it with everyone else."

## RACE PIT STOP

### Discussion Questions

1. The public relations team in this case study did not articulate specific measurable objectives. In reviewing the case, particularly the evaluation section, what types of measurable objectives do you think could be applicable to the type of campaign that was executed?

2. The campaign focused first on communicating with residents within Mississippi. Do you think this was a good strategy? Why or why not?

3. A significant strategy for this campaign was engaging schools, teachers, and students in Mississippi. Why do you think the public relations team took this approach? Was this an effective strategy?

4. Why do you think the public relations team made the decision to openly acknowledge all the criticism about the state? Do you think this strategy was beneficial?

### Trendlines

State and city convention and visitors bureaus often conduct highly visible public relations and ad campaigns to try to encourage tourism to the state or region. Virginia's "Virginia Is for Lovers" campaign and Las Vegas's "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas" campaign are indicative of this. Virginia's campaign began in 1969 and continued to evolve over the years and helped bring in more than $24 billion in tourism revenue to the state in 2016,[1] while also adding an emphasis on attracting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community to the state.[2] While tourism is a key driver for many campaigns, the MBI effort tried to change perceptions of an entire region. This is important

to keep residents from leaving the area, to attract businesses and new residents, and to draw visitors.

While the Mississippi campaign attempts to change internal and external perceptions of the state, many other U.S. states and counties have very negative images in terms of health, education, poverty, personal safety, and other areas. Research your city, state, or county. What negative perceptions do people have of it? What creative campaign ideas and messages could help change those perceptions?

## REFERENCES

1. Governor McAuliffe announces tourism revenue reached $24 billion in 2016. (2017, May 8). *Office of the Governor of Virginia*. Retrieved from https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=20229

2. Foley, D. (2016, September 25). Virginia now welcoming a broader array of "lovers." *WTOP*. Retrieved from http://wtop.com/virginia/2016/09/virginia-now-welcoming-broader-array-lovers/

## A STRATEGIC VIEW: Public Relations and Tech Startups: A Case of OnlineVisas.com

*Anna Klyueva, University of Houston–Clear Lake and Velie Law Firm*

In the age of digital media, public relations has become increasingly important, especially with the boom of content marketing, which focuses on delivering value-driven subject matter to potential customers. The effectiveness of online content marketing strategies often depends on good material. This is where public relations can offer the most by bringing knowledge and insight to elevating brand perceptions, raising awareness, and positively



*Source:* Velie Law Firm (2016), www.onlinevisas.com. Reproduced with permission.

engaging with publics through content. Public relations offers a variety of cost-effective strategies, and it can serve as a starting point for growing the audience and customer base for many tech startups.

In 2016, Velie Law Firm launched a startup—a global collaboration platform aimed at bringing together immigration attorneys, companies, and individuals from around the world. From the start, OnlineVisas.com's campaign focused on building relationships with publics and using inbound strategies to drive traffic to its new website (www.onlinevisas.com). In general, inbound strategies are about attracting the attention of prospective

**Velie Law Firm**
April 3, 2016 · 🌐

OnlineVisas has a 94% success rate! We would love the opportunity to assist you in your application process for a variety of visas. Want to know more? Check out our website! www.onlinevisas.com #OnlineVisas #VelieLawFirm #Visas #Visa #immigrationlaw #WeDeliverDreams #Success #Dreams #International #UnitedStates

All you need is a *Dream*

www.onlinevisas.com

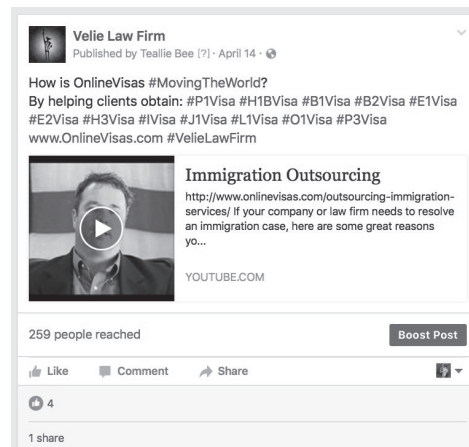👍 Like · 💬 Comment · ↪ Share

*Source:* Facebook/@Velie Law Firm.

customers by providing useful content that generates new visitors, fosters a loyal audience for the site, and helps build client leads. The idea behind the inbound strategy for OnlineVisas.com rested on the notion that making friends on social media was more important than making contacts. After all, social media remains social if the content allows users to engage and to socialize. For an inbound strategy to be effective, search engine optimization strategies need to raise the client's online visibility. Moreover, onsite content should offer value and originality, and social content must emphasize genuine engagement, with scheduled posts and promotional content carefully constructed so that they do not counter authenticity.

The campaign aimed to generate website traffic and increase visit duration by 10%, as well as to establish Jon Velie, founder and CEO, as a thought leader and an expert, whose opinion the media might seek. To achieve these goals, the startup team developed a set of social media tactics focused on creating quality content and developing meaningful hashtags that allowed connecting to a larger conversation on immigration.

First, the campaign team made sure messaging and branding was consistent across platforms. An audit of accounts ensured the use of the uniform company description, logos, and website links. Building upon the company's vision, two principal messages were developed: "Delivering Dreams" and "Together, We Move the World." Other messages included slogans such as "94% Success Rate," "Your Visa Is a Click Away," "All You Need Is a Dream," and "Free Re-file in Case of Denial."
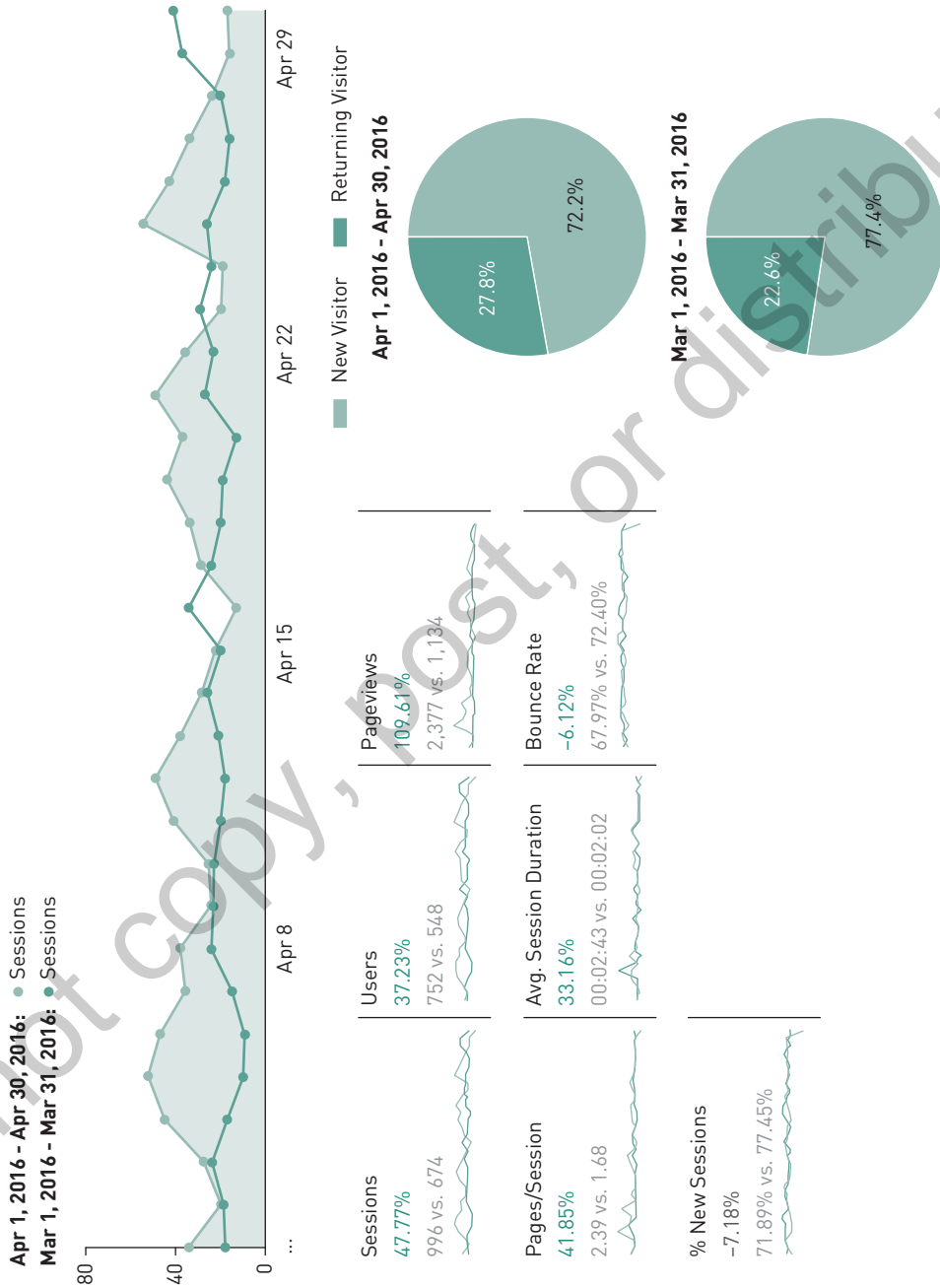
Second, messages were paired with appropriate website pages to drive traffic and then hold the visitor's interest, thereby decreasing bounce rate (i.e., the percentage of visitors to a website who leave after looking at only one page). Landing pages with a call to action allowed the website visitors to contact Velie Law and OnlineVisas.com representatives and request a free consultation and a strategy session.

Third, all posts were accompanied by meaningful hashtags that brought together publics interested in the topic, such as #P1visa, #B2visa, #H-1Bvisa, #HR, #OnlineVisas, #flatfeevisaapplication, and #immigration. One important consideration in piggybacking on generic hashtags was to follow the conversation and ensure it was relevant to the campaign's goals. For example,



**Velie Law Firm**
Published by Teallie Bee [?] · April 14 · 🌐

How is OnlineVisas #MovingTheWorld?
By helping clients obtain: #P1Visa #H1BVisa #B1Visa #B2Visa #E1Visa #E2Visa #H3Visa #IVisa #J1Visa #L1Visa #O1Visa #P3Visa
www.OnlineVisas.com #VelieLawFirm

**Immigration Outsourcing**
http://www.onlinevisas.com/outsourcing-immigration-services/ If your company or law firm needs to resolve an immigration case, here are some great reasons yo...
YOUTUBE.COM

259 people reached · [Boost Post]

👍 Like · 💬 Comment · ↪ Share

👍 4
1 share

*Source:* Facebook/@Velie Law Firm.

## FIGURE 1.1 ■ Analytics of Views for OnlineVisas.com

**Apr 1, 2016 - Apr 30, 2016:** ● Sessions
**Mar 1, 2016 - Mar 31, 2016:** ● Sessions



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sessions** | **Users** | **Pageviews** |
| 47.77% | 37.23% | 109.61% |
| 996 vs. 674 | 752 vs. 548 | 2,377 vs. 1,134 |
| **Pages/Session** | **Avg. Session Duration** | **Bounce Rate** |
| 41.85% | 33.16% | –6.12% |
| 2.39 vs. 1.68 | 00:02:43 vs. 00:02:02 | 67.97% vs. 72.40% |
| **% New Sessions** | | |
| –7.18% | | |
| 71.89% vs. 77.45% | | |

New Visitor ■ Returning Visitor

**Apr 1, 2016 - Apr 30, 2016**

27.8%  72.2%

**Mar 1, 2016 - Mar 31, 2016**

22.6%  77.4%

*Source:* Facebook, Instagram, Google Analytics.

#immigration attracted conversations about sometimes controversial statements from then presidential candidate Donald Trump on the topic and brought in unnecessary negativity. The hashtag was later replaced with #immigrationlaw.

Social analytics data from Facebook, Instagram, and Google Analytics confirmed the campaign's successes. Overall traffic to the website increased by 37%, and the session duration rose by 33%. In addition, the campaign increased page views by nearly 100%, meaning that visitors had accessed rarely viewed content. Overall success of the campaign can be attributed to aligning the campaign's strategic thinking with sound knowledge of appropriate use (and measurement) of social media platforms. Both these strengths led to the creation of value-driven content and meaningful hashtags that targeted publics interested in the subject matter.